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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: NEW PARLIAMENT OPENS WITH POMP AND CEREMONY

REF: FREETOWN 573

¶1. (U) Summary: Amid impressive fanfare, and on schedule, the third parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone was officially opened on Friday, October 5 with an opening address by President Ernest Bai Koroma. Ambassador, DCM and AF/W Director Tom Dougherty attended the ceremony. The new Parliament includes 124 members, 12 of whom are Paramount chiefs chosen through a separate electoral process. Of the remaining 112 seats, 16 are women. The seating of Parliament marks the culmination of months of campaigning and electoral activity. End Summary.

¶2. (U) President Koroma officially opened parliament and laid out an ambitious plan to address Sierra Leone's ills. He gave himself 36 months to achieve his goals. He recognized the challenges and high expectations of those who voted him into office and his speech was punctuated by applause from the majority of members and observers. However, at one point he lost the applause of the opposition SLPP parliamentarians who met his observation that "...when a government reneges on its promises to effectively serve the people, that government is destined to be rejected by the people," with glum discontent.

¶3. (U) In this, his first public speech since his September 22 swearing in, Koroma laid out a list of the initiatives the country needed in order to move ahead, including civil service reform, tackling corruption, improving national security and defense, combating trafficking in persons and money laundering, improving justice and the rule of law, promoting peace and national reconciliation, delivering clean water, restoring energy and power, improving health care delivery, reducing poverty and expanding education, increasing agricultural production and regulating environmentally responsible mineral production. He gave great emphasis to private sector development, noting Sierra Leone's low ranking as a place to conduct business. (Note: Full text of speech is being transmitted to the Department.)

Emphasis on Anti-Corruption Efforts and Electricity

¶4. (U) President Koroma laid great stress on anti-corruption initiatives and repeated his September 17 promise made at his swearing-in that he would have "zero tolerance" for corruption (reftel). Amid applause, he also pledged that he and his ministers would submit personal asset reports, and pledged that he would reinvigorate the Anti-Corruption Commission to increase its independence and ability to investigate and prosecute corruption. He thanked international donors and the support of the international community, perhaps by way of acknowledging that Sierra Leone will not be able undertake this effort alone. The President declared that a first priority of the new

government is to restore electricity to the country and pledged to set up a Presidential Energy Emergency Task Force immediately with the objective of rapidly restoring the supply of electricity. He promised to accelerate completion of the Bumbuna hydroelectric project, aiming for completion in 2009. The Bumbuna project was started years ago, but never completed. He vowed to would seek interim solutions until the hydroelectric power is available.

¶5. (U) Noting that Sierra Leone ranks at the bottom rung of the UN Human Development Index, as well as being rated among the 20 worst places in the world in which to do business by the Doing Business Index, President Koroma pledged to remove impediments and barriers to investment. He added that his government will pursue a strategy of adding value in the agro-business sector while developing marine, mineral and tourism potential. He also announced that a Commission to focus on Small and Medium Scale Enterprises would be established.

#### The Parties Show Their Colors

¶6. (U) The opening session was marked with ceremony, with an emphasis on correct costume. On the floor of parliament, the former opposition, the 59 members of All People,s Congress, APC, proudly took their seats on the majority side, resplendent in party colors of white and red. The former majority, the 43 members of Sierra Leone People,s Party (SLPP) were, in comparison, arrayed in subdued shades of their party color, green. The 10 new minority members representing presidential candidate Charles Margai,s SLPP breakaway Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) entered together to take their seats, brightly robed in

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outfits tailored from the same orange cloth representing their party color (leading a wag to dub them "Charlie's Angels").

Comment

¶7. (SBU) Expectations are high following successful elections and the promising speech by President Koroma. Public statements and press commentary suggest Sierra Leone's new leadership is well aware of the challenges it faces and is eager to meet them. International support will be essential in addressing the country's future development and growth.  
End Comment.

PERRY